Using Literature to Influence Learning and Meet Students’ Needs

Kelsey Whipple

Katharine Young

Kasondra Moulton

Jennifer Ibarra

College of Saint Mary

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to discover and describe how teachers use literature to influence learning and meet students’ needs at the elementary level. The literature review attempts to describe and explain the types of children’s literature, how teachers engage and motivate students using literature and what bibliotherapy is. The uses of children’s literature can include entertainment and academic, social, and behavioral needs to students. Bibliotherapy will be discussed. It will focus on the types of students who need bibliotherapy and the facilitators who may implement it; strategies, materials and activities used in this method; how to execute bibliotherapy in the classroom; reasons to use bibliotherapy; and finally, overall benefits and assessments of the bibliotherapy process. The information in the literature review was the background knowledge for our study on how teachers use literature to influence learning and meet students’ needs socially, academically, and behaviorally. The researchers connected what they learned in the literature review to the answers that were provided by the surveyed and interviewed teachers. The findings suggest that all of the surveyed teachers use literature in their classroom daily. It is suggested that it is used in a variety of subjects and for a variety of reasons.

**INTRODUCTION**

Every teacher has his or her own style for the types of literature in his or her classroom and how they are used. Some teachers use literature as an influential tool for student learning. The purpose of this study is to discover and describe how teachers use literature to influence learning and meet students’ needs at the elementary level. For this study, literature will be generally defined as children’s literature and students’ needs will be generally defined as social and behavioral interactions in the classroom. The background knowledge for the research is comprised in the literature review. It focuses on the types of children’s literature, engaging and motivating students in the classroom, and bibliotherapy. The research study tries to discover how teachers use literature in the classroom and for what purposes.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The following two questions were the focal point of the research. What types of literature do teachers use when working with social and behavior issues? How do teachers use children’s literature to guide students’ learning? After researching these two questions, the researchers hypothesized that literature is an important part of a curriculum and that teachers are using it to meet students’ academic, social, and behavioral needs in a variety of ways.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Multiple researchers have found that literature can be an important tool for teachers in meeting students’ academic, behavioral and social needs in the classroom. Lynch and Brown have suggested that children’s literature has always been a method of educating at the elementary level. Books used at this level should be aimed at entertaining and educating children. During the elementary years, students are supposed to be developing language. They need simple plot stories, and nursery rhymes for them to memorize; easy concept books; and later on, more complex concept books and issues books to read. There are all kinds of children’s literature in a range of different genres. The best types of books are the kind that keep students’ interest and have memorable characters (Lynch-Brown, 2014).

It is important for children to read and be read to. Both reading and being read to improve children’s knowledge and make learning fun. When looking for books to read aloud to your students, focus first on the pictures in the story before the plot content or writing. Reading aloud to children early on helps start the foundation for speaking skills. The more language the child experiences through reading aloud and conversations, the more advanced they will be socially and emotionally. As students grow and learn, it is important for teachers to change the literature they use to keep up with their students’ growth. “When we read aloud to young students, they gain a vast amount of general knowledge, especially when they listen to stories they are unable to read by themselves” (Fox, 2001, p. 100). Teachers are challenging students when they add in more complex materials or different skills into reading (Fox, 2001).

In the classroom, fictional children’s books are the most widely used type of literature because students are better able to identify with characters in these stories. It is imperative for teachers to find time during the day to allow their students to read. Students will find literature more useful if they enjoy it. “The more expressively we read the more fantastic the experience will be. The more fantastic the experience, the more our kids will love books, and the more they’ll “pretend” to read. And the more they “pretend” to read, the quicker they’ll learn to read” (Fox, 2001, p. 40). Teachers should strive for all of their students to learn and enjoy reading in order to be successful academically. Literature can be an important resource outside of academics.

The experiences students have with literacy at school may be the first and only they ever had. Everyday tasks such as writing an email or reading instructions are both ways that literacy skills are used outside of the classroom. Literacy skills are important for students to obtain in order to be successful in life. After the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) surveyed a group of students, Rodriguez (2003) found that [students] “felt forced to read their books in order to complete assignments.” What students see and feel during their introduction to literacy can encourage or possibly discourage their interest in classroom participation. It is important to keep students interested in literature, therefore keeping them interested in the lesson content. Incorporating literature in different academic subjects can increase student engagement in the classroom if it is implemented correctly.

“To assure relevance, text and activities should be linked to real life experiences, hands on activities, a conceptual theme, and should be culturally relevant” (McRae & Guthrie, 2009). In a classroom with many hands-on activities that are closely related to books reading growth is higher than in classrooms with fewer hands-on activities. Another indicator of reading engagement is teacher support; teachers should fully support their students and believe they are capable of reading well (McRae & Guthrie, 2009).

In order to help each child understand the text, teachers need to activate background knowledge before, during, and after reading. This aids the students in creating connections with the text through their lives and interests. For example, having a discussion about a recent trip to the grocery store with a family member may help the students relate to a text about the variety of foods you can buy at a grocery store and how they get there. “For situations where students have little or no existing background knowledge, hands-on activities help to bring personal experience of a new concept to the class” (McRae & Guthrie, 2009). It is important for teachers to look at textbooks and their students’ reading levels. Many textbooks in content areas contain excessive vocabulary, are relatively incoherent, and are disconnected from students’ background knowledge.

When teachers support this need for collaboration by allowing students to share ideas and build knowledge together, a sense of belongingness is established in the classroom community, and the extension and elaboration of existing knowledge is facilitated. Students who work together on a reading task are combining their background knowledge and skill sets, learning from each other, and building a shared understanding of the material.

Grouping students of varying reading levels can also be motivating, as the struggling students gain the perspective of more experienced readers, and the advanced readers clarify their own understanding through explaining concepts and reading strategies to their peers. For example, modeling and scaffolding students to say appropriately, “I disagree with you” or “I want to add two points to what you are saying,” enables learners to become more interactively effective.

When engaging through literature, it is important to encourage all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Supporting these skills in the classroom will create a culture of critical thinking instead of one with right answers only. If books are being used, let students preview the book by looking at the cover and illustrations. Provide students with pre-reading questions and activities so they can collaborate, make predictions, and become interested in the material. Depending on the level and purpose of the assignment the students can read or be read to. Teachers should use follow-up activities to summarize the story, make observations of the characters, clarify confusion, and connect the story to real life (Rodriguez, 2003).

Literature can easily be incorporated into the arts. For example, teachers can allow students to listen to music that relates to stories. Painting posters, creating clay models, or drawing pictures are also ways that teachers can help students understand the literature. For older students, this could be expanded into writing a paper on how the art relates to the story. Finding techniques that will show students the purpose for reading can be achieved by blending in art activities (Rodriguez, 2003).

There are many ways to include literature in academic subjects throughout the day. The level of difficulty and amount of literature used depends on the age and ability of the children as individuals. The goal of literature integration is to help students comprehend material, think critically, and spark their curiosity by adding to and reconstructing prior knowledge of the materials presented (Rodriguez, 2003). This will begin to change the student’s perception of the material, and therefore, engage them, reduce unwanted behaviors, and increase their level of respect for their personal education (Rodriguez, 2003).

Students are able to learn science skills better if literature is used as an instructional tool. Literature materials can include fiction or nonfiction, online resources, textbooks, and magazines. Teachers can use more than one method of learning, including “combining observations of the real world, record-keeping, experiments, and other hands-on science activities with literature, to introduce a science topic and for continued research on the topic in the classroom” (Cox, 2011).

A collection of classroom books that include science can engage students and motivate them to make connections. Science trade books use adventure and factual information to encourage interest. These cater to different grades and reading abilities and can be used to introduce a science topic, explore known topics, answer student questions, or read aloud to the class. Younger students can follow factual information better if it is presented as a story line blended with facts. This helps them comprehend and stay engaged in the lesson. “Using a collection of trade books on a science-related topic allows a teacher to integrate a theme based and project approach to teaching science” (Cox, 2011). When selecting books, it is important that teachers look for reliability and accuracy. The books need to support current science standards and be appropriate for each grade and level (Cox, 2011).

The scholastic Magic School Bus series is an example of a fictional story that holds students’ attention while giving accurate science information. “A teacher can introduce a science topic with one of the books in the series and then introduce a variety of books of nonfiction on the topic to support student learning” (Cox, 2011). Educators need to incorporate different genres and understand that nonfictional material is as useful and valuable as fictional material.

Using literature during social studies can add to experiences students have with the material. The goal is to transport students to a specific time and place through literature. “Social Studies concepts can be learned through the interaction between what the students bring with them to the reading knowledge-wise and what they learn by reading and discussing the stories and information in trade books” (Almerico). Books can give students a chance to connect with characters from the present or past to help them understand their own lives.

Literature can be used for more than academic purposes in the classroom. “Books cool things down when children have been upset by arguments or yelling. Books cheer them up when they’re ill. Books stop them from being fretful in situations when we need them to be well-behaved” (Fox, 2001, p. 34). In fact, professionals have discovered a unique coping option and learning experience called bibliotherapy that has been shown to help individuals, especially children, deal with crisis and change.

“Bibliotherapy is simply defined as the use of books to help people solve problems” (Forgan, 2002, p. 75). Karen W. Gavigan and Stephanie Kurtts elaborated on Forgan’s definition by defining bibliotherapy as “a method of using literature to help students understand themselves and cope with problems relevant to their personal situations and developmental needs” (Gavigan & Kurtts, 2011, p. 11). The importance of Gavigan and Kurtts’ definition is that it emphasizes some of the topics to focus on when using bibliotherapy and that the method can be used for situations and needs of a personal nature.

Sarah Borders and Pamela Paisley defined bibliotherapy as “a process or activity designed to help individuals solve problems or better understand themselves through their response to literature or media” (Borders & Paisley, 1992, p. 131). People use bibliotherapy as a way to connect books with experiences in their own lives and use events in the stories to learn approaches for handling problems. In her article, A Feeling for Books, Jennifer Burek-Pierce, a professor of library at the University of Iowa, described bibliotherapy as a method of healing (Burek-Pierce, 2010). Books, both fiction and nonfiction, picture or chapter, can be used for bibliotherapy. Selecting the right book depends upon how a person may react to the book so that it does its job: help the individual identify himself or herself within the book (Burek-Pierce, 2010).

In the classroom, fictional children’s books are the most widely used type of literature because students are better able to identify with characters in these stories. It is important to select the proper book for each individual student so he or she can benefit from reading about story characters that are experiencing the same conditions or events the student is living through. For example, a child struggling with his or her parents’ divorce will relate best to books about characters whose parents are divorced. Overall, this type of literature is used to educate individuals about the personal issues they are facing (Iaquinta & Hipsky, 2006, p. 209). Literature in bibliotherapy needs to be focused on using the literature in therapeutic ways to aid children in working through a crisis (Kramer, 1999).

A crisis can be a major event in a student’s life such as death or a smaller problem such as a conflict with peers. No matter how big or small the crisis, bibliotherapy can be useful to the person. “Bibliotherapy can be used to provide information or insight about problems, stimulate discussion about problems, create awareness that other people have similar problems, and in some cases provide solutions to problems” (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006, p. 6). The uses of bibliotherapy are not assigned to one specific topic or one method, it is a universal concept that can apply to a large variety of topics and can be accompanied by a massive quantity of activities to support the literature (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006).

Two types of bibliotherapy are used by professionals: clinical and developmental. Clinical bibliotherapy is most often used by mental health professionals and the approach used is directed reading. Books in clinical bibliotherapy are used to stimulate discussion of difficult feelings or memories. Developmental bibliotherapy, on the other hand, is most often used in the classroom by teachers, librarians, counselors, and other school professionals. The common goal of developmental bibliotherapy is “to facilitate normal development and to educate students about attitudes, feelings, and behaviors such as bullying, divorce, and self-image” (Catalano, 2008, p. 17). There are three stages in Developmental Bibliotherapy: 1) identification; 2) catharsis; and 3) insight. Each stage will be discussed in depth later in this review when the guidelines of bibliotherapy are examined.

The concept of bibliotherapy is not new. For centuries, psychologists have been using books as a coping method for individuals. “The origins of bibliotherapy can be traced as far back as ancient Greece where literature was used to treat the mentally ill” (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 91). During ancient times, a library was known to be the healing place for the soul. People in those times used the terms “biblion,” meaning book, and “therapeia,” meaning healing (Kurtts & Gavigan, 2008, p. 23). There may not have been books created specifically to help individuals heal from specific conditions, but books were the tools society used to help people who were mentally or physically ill. Years later, in the 17th century, books with spiritual titles were used by American colonists as a way to guide people in decision-making. In the 18th century, self-help literature became a new trend and in these pieces, there were promises of health and wealth. By the start of the 19th century, doctors were working with librarians to prescribe books to patients along with medicine. The idea behind prescribing books was that patients would become more aware of their condition (Catalano, 2008, p. 17).

It wasn’t until 1916 that the term, “bibliotherapy” was finally coined by Samuel McChord Crothers, an American author. Crothers used the word loosely with a lack of definition. It was a term he used to define lists of books used for therapeutic purposes (Kurtts & Gavigan, 2008, p. 23). The article by Crothers was discovered in an edition of Atlantic Monthly (Morawski, 2000, p. 48). In the 1930s and 1940s, the term became widely used to describe lists of books. “Librarians began compiling lists of books for therapeutic purposes. In this tradition, any written material that helped individuals modify their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors was considered potentially therapeutic” (Gladding & Gladding, 1991, p. 7). The literature of the 1950s and 1960s increased the use of this method. “In the last two decades, bibliotherapy has expanded to include self-actualization, self-help and education, and problem-solving applications, often termed limited-contact therapy approaches” (Lenkowsky, 1987). As society moves further into the 21st century, the use of bibliotherapy is becoming more common. The aims and objectives of bibliotherapy match with the 21st century ideals for education (Brewster, 2008, p. 172).

With an understanding of how bibliotherapy came to be, a discussion can begin about the who, what, how and why of bibliotherapy followed by an assessment of its use in the classroom. First, a few terms must be defined: gifted and talented students; elementary education; Learning Disabilities; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); and bullying. Gifted and talented students are defined as students with high intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership, or specific academic ability, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop their capabilities. Elementary education is classified as academic instruction for students in grades one through four or six, usually including kindergarten, that teaches basic principles focused on reading, writing, and math. This definition is key to understanding the “why” of using bibliotherapy in an elementary classroom. Learning Disabilities (LD) are defined as “a disorder in 1 or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations” (Specific Learning Disabilities, 2014). ADHD refers to a condition that shows up in students who are overly active and have difficulty staying focused, paying attention, and controlling behavior. It is one of the most common childhood disorders. The last important term to understand is bullying, which is defined as “unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involve a real or perceived power imbalance” (Bullying Definition, 2014). An understanding of these terms will be important for later discussions.

Who Needs Bibliotherapy and Who May Facilitate It

Bibliotherapy can be taught and used by almost all educators but is most effective and useful when done by three types of professionals: counselors, teachers, and librarians. Each plays a different role in educating students. No matter which school specialist facilitates bibliotherapy, the important thing is that the books used “provide accurate information about the target behavior or situation and do not provide the student with unrealistic expectations or a false sense of hope” (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 93).

Counselors, spend a lot of time working with students to talk through problems and overcome emotional events. “Counselors are ideal facilitators for discussions of stories, since they have professional skills in active listening, clarification of content, and reflection of feeling” (Borders & Paisley, 1992, p. 131). When a counselor is the facilitator of bibliotherapy, he or she is especially skilled at helping children make connections between themselves and characters in a book. The counselor works with the student as a guide and offers perspective on the student’s relationships with others. In order to successfully guide the student, the counselor works with librarians, teachers, the child, and the child’s parents to pick the proper books for the student to work with. As the child reads the book and begins to identify with the characters, the guidance counselor focuses in on a specific skill that the child needs and builds on that topic (Borders & Paisley, 1992, p. 131). When a counselor works in conjunction with librarians, the two are selecting literature that can be the most beneficial for the problem the student is experiencing.

Librarians hold a distinct job in the bibliotherapy method because they are seen as topic matter experts. First, they are the keepers of the library. The library is a place for people to find free access to a multitude of self-help books. The librarian is the person who selects each book that is placed in the library and therefore must be trained to know the types of books people will find interesting and helpful (Brewster, 2008, p. 172). Secondly, the librarian must be a subject matter expert because in some cases, the librarian is the one working with the teacher and counselor to provide and teach bibliotherapy strategies to students. For this reason, he or she must not only be familiar with every piece of literature in the library, but must also be knowledgeable on the research and practices of bibliotherapy. He or she must know the books that should be used with students for specific issues they are facing (Catalano, 2008, p. 20). For example, when helping a student with ADHD, the librarian would choose a piece of literature that the student can relate to such as Eukee the Jumpy, Jumpy Elephant by E. Trevino and C. Corman. This book is about an elephant named Eukee who gets in trouble at school and at home because he can’t sit still and struggles to follow directions (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 96). The importance of understanding which books to choose creates the best compatibility between the student and the piece of literature.

“The librarian should be aware of issues in schools and the community that are likely to be addressed by teachers. “A librarian whose goal is to help students does not avoid those topics that are controversial or uncomfortable to address, such as teen sexuality” (Catalano, 2008, p. 21). Librarians need to be aware of all issues in their school because they will either need to secure literature for the library that is useful for specific topics, or pull out books that will be useful to teachers in their lessons related to a particular skill or problem. When a teacher is ready to address a topic, he or she discusses the topic with the librarian and asks him or her to develop a list of potential books that could be used for that bibliotherapy topic. Based on the grade level the teacher is instructing and the age of his or her students, the librarian’s job is “to evaluate popular literature for developmental appropriateness, content, and accuracy, as well as evaluate the authority of a work” (Catalano, 2008, p. 21). Just because a book is about the topic of interest, does not mean it will be meaningful to the student or useful to the teacher. Students must understand the story line and wording of a book in order to properly relate to it. The librarian’s role in bibliotherapy implementation and research is unique. He or she must be the teacher and the provider. This is the person other school officials will turn to when determining the materials and methods for using bibliotherapy in the classroom (Catalano, 2008, p. 21).

Another important person in the methodology of bibliotherapy is the teacher. Both special education and general education teachers have a duty to teach bibliotherapy lessons to students who are in need of specific skills. Teachers can use bibliotherapy to focus not only on subjects that deal with emotional crises such as death, illness, or divorce, but also on topics such as sharing, or acceptance. In fact, acceptance is a major use of bibliotherapy by inclusive classroom teachers. They use books to help students learn about individuals who are different and help each student develop empathy and acceptance. Bibliotherapy, in these cases, can be used to teach students that we are all different and have our own special abilities (Kurtts & Gavigan, 2008, p. 23).

Bibliotherapy is a practice that can be used by beginning teachers and experienced teachers alike. All teachers must develop this professional practice through analytical review. The importance of developing bibliotherapeutic practices not only benefits students but teachers as well. As teachers educate students on skills using bibliotherapy, they too, learn about the topic and face their own insecurities. This is becoming especially beneficial for teachers working for the first time with students who have specific disabilities because both students and teachers can be nervous about the situation (Morawski, 1997, p. 245). Teachers must understand which strategies to use and which books to pick in order to be most effective in their bibliotherapy practices.

Besides teachers, librarians, and counselors, another newly integral group of people in the bibliotherapy process is parents. Parents are beginning to see the benefits of using bibliotherapy at home to help children work on skills and manage emotional issues. “Bibliotherapy has found a widening audience of parents who view books as essential tools of child rearing and who also want to encourage their children to read” (Lawson, 1990). The involvement of parents in bibliotherapy is important for collaboration between students’ school and home life.

There would be no demand for bibliotherapy if there were no individuals to benefit from its practices. Anyone can benefit from bibliotherapy but it’s most common uses are helping individuals cope with grief, bullying, and learning acceptance and tolerance. Students with disabilities such as ADHD or Learning Disabilities can benefit from bibliotherapy as can students who are gifted and talented because it teaches them how to act in various social situations.

Students with ADHD benefit from the use of bibliotherapy because it helps them learn how to control their energy and attention spans. Although people with ADHD are smart, many have difficulty controlling their behaviors in social situations. When reading bibliotherapy books, they can relate to the story characters and pick up ideas for different techniques they can use to regain control of their behavior. A great example of a book for elementary students with ADHD is It’s Hard to Be a Verb by Julia Cook. In many cases, students with ADHD have difficulty understanding and verbalizing their behavioral responses to situations (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 92).

Students with learning disabilities who struggle in a specific subject area can benefit from bibliotherapy and learn to be confident in their own abilities and realize that other people struggle in the same ways they do. “Bibliotherapy can be used more extensively for students with significant learning and behavior problems to enhance self-understanding, and as a tool for enhancing reading comprehension” (Iaquinta & Hipsky, 2006, p. 210). By understanding his or her own disability, students are able to find help by relating to the characters in a bibliotherapeutic book. An example of a book that is great for addressing learning disabilities is I Am Not Dumb by A. Motiar (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 99).

“Gifted and talented girls often face emotional issues not met by other girls their age. There are high expectations for them by their parents, but their friends and sometimes their teachers, expect them to perform like their peers (Catalano, 2008, p. 19). Gifted and talented students, although smart, sometimes struggle in social situations because they do not know how to relate to their peers. For this reason, students who are gifted and talented can benefit from bibliotherapy because they can read books that portray similar characters and demonstrate how to engage with peers in social situations. Students with disabilities are not the only ones who benefit from bibliotherapy, however, because all students can find this method beneficial at one point or another. Bibliotherapy is useful for teaching social skills and tasks as noted earlier (Catalano, 2008).

Bibliotherapy is useful for dealing with a multitude of emotional problems and social skills. The two most common emotional problems are grief and bullying. Grief is something everyone experiences at one point or another and it is extremely important for students to understand that it is okay to feel sorrow and talk about it (Manifold, 2007, p. 20). Events such as parents’ divorce or death of a loved one can cause students to express sadness. In moments of emotional turmoil, students will have a number of questions running through their heads and might struggle to maintain control of their actions. Death is something that happens in everyone’s life. “When death separates a child form a loved one, in the child’s despairing loneliness, she may wonder…Who will I love and who will love me now that my beloved is gone” (Manifold, 2007, p. 20). In cases like this, it is important for students to know that they are well loved and that it is okay to grieve when they experience loss. When using bibliotherapy for these purposes, it is important to choose a book about showing the loss of the same family member or parents getting divorced so that the student can make the necessary connections and begin his or her healing process. An example of a book that can benefit students who experienced death is Carmine the Crow by Heidi Holder (Manifold, 2007, p. 21).

Bullying, like grief, can cause a person to feel as if he or she is not in control of his or her emotions. It is seen as the number-one concern of educators, parents, children, and health care providers (Gregory & Vessey, 2004, p. 127). This number-one concern makes it evident that bullying is a large problem in schools and affects many students. Some of the largest forms of bullying at the elementary level are name-calling and teasing. “Teasing and name-calling are unfortunate realities for many children in our schools. This is not only emotionally painful, but can undermine the sense of self-confidence and competence that students need to succeed academically” (Duimstra, 2003, p. 8). Any student can become involved in a bullying situation as the bully, the victim or the bystander. The bully is the person doing the unwanted behaviors to the victim and the bystander is the student who sees the behaviors occurring but, in many cases, does nothing because he or she doesn’t know what to do. “Bibliotherapy holds promise as a potential tool to strengthen positive, supportive, and inclusive classroom environments, in particular educating and involving bystanders in more actively supporting victims” (Moulton, Heath, Prater, & Dyches, 2011, p. 122). If students are aware of strategies they can use to help stop bullying, they are more likely to step in and try to do something; the very principle of bibliotherapy.

Bibliotherapy Materials, Strategies and Activities

A number of materials, strategies, and activities are available for carrying out a successful bibliotherapy program. Materials include literature sources, manipulatives, and activity books. Sources of literature are the books read by teachers to students or by students silently and are the suppliers of the connections between the student and the storybook character. Activity books are manuals used by teachers to narrow down activities they would like students to do, or use as a follow-up to reading a book. Manipulatives are the objects that aid in the production of bibliotherapy. Sometimes manipulatives are simple items such as stuffed animals that students can cuddle as they read the book and work through the issue (Catalano, 2008, p. 17).

Strategies are the courses of action that school officials take in order to properly and effectively assist students in bibliotherapy practices. Regardless of which strategy is used, instruction is an important factor when determining how effective a bibliotherapy lesson will be. The type of instruction used within an educational environmental can include whole class, individual, or small group. Typically the setting chosen is the classroom, the counselor’s office, or the library (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 92). One strategy that is widely used is an interactive process with guided discussions. In this strategy, the student reads a book either alone or with the teacher and then the teacher leads the student in a discussion over the book to help make connections between the characters and the child. A second strategy for helping students learn to identify with characters in the book is working with the student to pick out the theme and coping strategies that are used in the story (Nicholson & Pearson, 2003, p. 17).

The third most commonly used strategy is literature circles. These groups allow students who read the same book or read about the same topic. They allow students to interact and discuss the selected books that are of interest to them. Students may read books individually and discuss with the group, or read books together. In this type of environment, children have a high opportunity for success as they relate to not only the book, but also the other students in their group (Stringer, Reynolds, & Simpson, 2003, p. 70). After a small-group session, students take part in a teacher-directed discussion. This discussion allows the teacher to see the level of achievement and the types of connections made (Stringer, Reynolds, & Simpson, 2003, p. 70).

In order for any of the strategies to be successful, there must be collaboration and interaction between teachers, counselors, and students. “The interaction of bibliotherapy, meaning the interpersonal connections formed between students and facilitators, must more so than the reading, be the key to bibliotherapy’s success” (Schreur, 2006, p. 108). Without the collaboration of all individuals involved, the goals of bibliotherapy cannot be met. The strategies and activities that teachers use in the method go hand in hand. Almost any activity done in the classroom can be tweaked and changed to make it useful and beneficial to bibliotherapy. Janice Nicholson, a professor of elementary education, and Quinn Pearson, a professor of counselor education, developed a list of creative activities that can be used by teachers when practicing bibliotherapy. “These activities include art activities, dramatization, pantomiming, puppetry, role playing, and written responses” (Nicholson & Pearson, 2003, p. 17). They furthered their list later in the article, adding: reading aloud, composing a letter or book, and constructing collages (Nicholson & Pearson, 2003, p. 17). No activity is confined to one specific subject; each can be modified for use both with and without bibliotherapy. The professors created a list of activities to engage children and help them relate to bibliotherapy stories on a higher personal level.

Activities not named specifically on Nicholson and Pearson’s list are follow-up activities, which are especially important. They are “designed to elicit an understanding of the problem and encourage the student to provide a solution to the presented problem or situation” (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 94). Follow-up activities give students a plan and guidelines on how to make the final connections with the book. By having students provide a solution, teachers have students think about how they will handle the issue they are experiencing in real life. This type of activity is great for determining students’ coping methods (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 94). It is important in the bibliotherapy process to use activities before reading, during the use of all strategies, and after reading a bibliotherapy book (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 94). Follow-up activities are what tie the lesson together and reveal the true meaning of the book and help students build the necessary connections.

How to Implement Bibliotherapy

Learning how to implement bibliotherapy properly is necessary to have the process reach its full potential in the classroom. To implement the bibliotherapy practice effectively, it is important to understand how to identify students who need bibliotherapy and know the models that teachers can use. Facilitators must understand that “in school, bibliotherapy was more effective as a contributor to a group or individual therapeutic treatment than as an isolated intervention. Hence, we need to turn to a collaborative interactive model with clearly defined student, teacher, and counselor roles” (Wolpow, 2001, p. 606). Mediators must recognize that bibliotherapy is a helpful method not a disciplinary method. It should be used to help students cope with and recognize their own problems. The adult must first identify a need or problem in the child’s life. Common examples in elementary school are parents’ divorce or adjusting to a new sibling. The adult must then carefully choose a book to fit the student’s reading level, and cognitive awareness, but that will also spark interest and match the student’s need. If the book doesn’t match the student, the three stages of developmental bibliotherapy will be unsuccessful (Stamps, 2003, p. 27). After identifying the type of book they want to use, the teacher must understand the process for implementing developmental bibliotherapy.

The three stages of the developmental bibliotherapy implementation process are identification, catharsis, and insight. “Identification is the process of affiliating some real or fictional character with oneself. To facilitate this step, students should be encouraged to recall relevant incidents from their own lives” (Catalano, 2008, p. 18). The identification process is where the student forms his or her initial connection with the book’s characters. Catharsis happens if the child is able to build the connection. The student begins to relate events from their own life with the character and in doing so, begins to release built up emotions. The catharsis stage is often followed by follow-up activities to help students connect all the pieces (Gregory & Vessey, 2004, p. 129). The final stage, insight, is when the student evaluates the relationship he or she has built with the main character. He or she begins to make comparisons between themselves and the character. The insight stage cannot occur until all the student’s emotional tension has been relieved so that he or she may think clearly. This stage helps children to address the attitudes and behaviors (Morawski, 1997). Each of the three steps must occur in order for the bibliotherapy process to be successful.

To address their three stages of developmental bibliotherapy, Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, and Johnstun developed a ten-step model for implementation. Step one is developing rapport, trust, and confidence with the student. This is done before bibliotherapy is ever introduced. The teacher needs to ensure that the student trusts the teacher and feels secure with him or her. A way to develop this step is for the teacher to try to get to know the student. Step two is to identifying the other school officials who could assist the teacher. Collaboration is one of the main components of bibliotherapy and it is therefore important for teachers to know that they are not alone. Teachers can identify other adults who can aid them in a successful bibliotherapeutic process.

The third step is soliciting support from the student’s parents; the people who know the child better than anyone and can supply a history of the child’s behavior. Teachers need to be careful when determining whether or not to include step three in the model if the parents are a contributing factor to the child’s problem. Next, in step four, the teacher must define the specific problem that the student is experiencing at school. Step five is to creating goals and activities to address the problem. The teacher sets goals for the student’s behaviors and determines if bibliotherapy will be an effective process to use with that particular student. The teacher decides if this problem needs to be addressed individually, in a small group, or as an entire class (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006, p.7).

After completing steps one through five of the bibliotherapy model, the teacher can move on to steps six through ten. Step six is researching and selecting books appropriate for the situation. This is when the teacher works with counselors and librarians to select the type and level of book that will be effective for a specific student. The books must be age, grade, and reading level appropriate and must portray the topic of interest. Step seven is to introduce the book to the student. In this step, the teacher leads students in pre-reading techniques and previews the book. The teacher talks to the student about the problem or behavior he or she has noticed before reading the book.

Step eight is to incorporate reading strategies. Any reading strategy can be used in this step. As the child reads the book or is read to, he or she practices the reading strategies picked by the teacher. The purpose of this step is to help the student relate to the characters in the book. An example of a reading strategy is a Venn-diagram comparing and contrasting the characters to the child. The ninth step is to implement post-reading activities. After finishing a book, “the teacher can engage students in post-reading activities focused on relating to the story and expressing their personal feelings and experiences” (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006, p. 9). The activities in this step are the same as ones discussed in the previous section. The tenth, and final, step is to evaluate the effects of bibliotherapy on the student. This is done by the teacher and other adults involved. They evaluate each step and determine what can be improved for the next time. The ten-step model for bibliotherapy is the universal plan for how school officials can properly implement the bibliotherapy process into the classroom and make it effective for students (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006, p. 8-9).

Why Use Bibliotherapy?

Bibliotherapy is useful with an entire class because “it allows those students to empathize with those who suffer anxieties created by childhood traumas. Students can develop problem-solving skills whether they have experienced these traumas themselves” (Catalano, 2008, p. 18). By using whole class instruction, teachers are allowing students to learn and gain knowledge from each other; they see that they are not the only ones dealing with a problem. “One of the primary reasons bibliotherapy is effective in the school setting is that it recognizes that teachers, librarians, and school counselors know and understand their students’ academic, social, and emotional needs (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 92). When students feel they are understood not only by their peers but by their teachers as well, they are more likely to take the process seriously and find it useful. Bibliotherapy builds trust between students and teachers.

There are six goals teachers can work toward when implementing bibliotherapy into their elementary classroom: provide information to students; deliver insight on a specific experience or issue; give students replacement solutions to a problem; stimulate discussion about the real problem; and, finally, link new values and attitudes with regard to the issue. The last goal aids students in understanding that they are not the only ones experiencing this crisis (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 92). If a teacher can meet any one of these goals, bibliotherapy can be extremely affective.

In addition to the six teachers goals six benefits exist for students. “Less physical violence in the classroom, less name-calling, fewer put-downs, improved conflict-resolution strategies, increased sensitivity to peers, and increased ability to listen to peers” (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 95). The most promising benefit not listed above is the ability of the pupils to identify with and gain a better understanding of their individual characteristics and reactions. Bibliotherapy develops a sense of self-awareness and empathy for everyone who is involved in the process (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 95). When the teacher is selecting topics that will be beneficial to the entire class, they must be careful to pick subjects that are developmental in nature. When topics are developmental, they allow students to grow and learn from the books, their peers, and themselves (Forgan, 2002, p. 79-80).

In terms of specific skills or issues that need to be identified in bibliotherapy, Katherine E. Gregory and Judith A. Vessey stated “this method is useful for communicating information about teasing and bullying, helping children learn empathy for one another, and providing them with strategies for deflecting or minimizing bullying attempts” (Gregory & Vessey, 2004, p. 127). This is evidence that teachers should use bibliotherapy as a way to push communication and awareness of issues in the school. Students can learn that these problems are not acceptable and they do not have to put up with them.

One negative outcome of some bibliotherapy attempts is that “the effectiveness of the approach was limited only by the availability of materials on certain topics and client readiness and willingness to read” (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). When schools do not have enough materials on specific topics, students are unable to properly work through the stages of bibliotherapy. To counteract this problem, school officials must work together to properly plan and implement the process and make sure books are available that contain the necessary materials for success. A second factor that can compromise a successful bibliotherapy outcome is facilitators not having adequate knowledge on child development and developmental issues. All facilitators should have some background knowledge and training in human development before beginning bibliotherapy with students. A third factor that can turn into a negative is the literature chosen. If a book is too sophisticated or too immature for the student, he or she will not find the literature useful and will not engage in the stages of developmental bibliotherapy (Gladding & Gladding, 1991).

There are multiple benefits of using bibliotherapy. A major one is that “it provides the opportunity for the participants to more fully recognize themselves or certain characteristics they have such as shyness or envy” (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). Whether using bibliotherapy with the whole class, small groups, or individuals, students can learn a lot about themselves that is important for development. Bibliotherapy also provides students with a way to release all of their built up emotions because as stated before, they are able to see that they are not the only one going through the experience (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). For special educators, a benefit of bibliotherapy is “to help exceptional children better understand themselves and their feeling and as a counseling strategy within the classroom to meet social and emotional needs” (Lenkowsky, 2001, p. 123). Students with disabilities are aided by bibliotherapy as they learn more about their disability and gain knowledge on how to act in certain situations. The last major benefit of bibliotherapy is teacher development. When teachers are involved in the process, they become role models for students and help connect the content of books to real life. Teachers can help students think through the content and make a clear relationship (Morawski, 1997). Overall, the entire school environment can benefit from the use of bibliotherapy in the elementary classroom.

Conclusion

Whether the facilitator of bibliotherapy is the general education teacher, special education teacher, counselor, librarian, or any other school professional, the process of bibliotherapy can be successful. The facilitator needs to have the proper knowledge about child development and work with other school officials to learn about specific topics and books that are related to problems students have. All students could benefit from bibliotherapy at some point in their lives. When facilitators decide there is a need for bibliotherapy in their elementary classrooms, they can choose from a variety of materials, strategies, and activities to make the process more effective. The methods and processes of implementing these strategies and activities into lessons are important factors in the effectiveness of bibliotherapy.

Although not all students will relate to books in the same way or find bibliotherapy useful, it is important for teachers to understand the pros and cons to determine when it is an appropriate time to use the process. The books selected need to match the student’s intellect and topics of interest. Most importantly, however, is the trust that must be built between the child and the teacher. If students trust their teachers, they will trust the teacher’s practices such as bibliotherapy. This literature review identified the history and definition of bibliotherapy along with the who, what, how, and why/assessment factors of bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is a process that is becoming widely popular in the elementary classroom and will be one that I will use in my future classroom.

**METHODS**

Mixed Method Research

The study’s research design reflected a mixed research method. Open-ended interview questions provided information about the ways teachers are using literature in their classrooms. The teacher survey provided quantitative evidence on the frequency of literature used during the academic day in elementary classrooms. It also identified the genres of books that worked best with students’ academic, social, and behavioral needs. The open-ended questions at the end of the survey allowed teachers to elaborate on how they involve their students with the literature used in the classroom and any other information they felt was helpful to our study.

Assumptions

Throughout the study, researchers assumed that all of the teachers were passionate about literature and were open and honest with their responses on the survey questionnaire. It was also assumed that teachers used literature as a daily tool in their classroom both for instruction and for entertainment.

Operational Definitions

Children’s Literature:

“The body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young people. The genre encompasses a wide range of works, including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books and easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children, fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, and other primarily orally transmitted materials” (Fadiman, 2014).

Behavior Problem:

“Symptomatic expression of emotional or interpersonal maladjustment especially in children such as that seen in, by nail-biting, enuresis, negativism, or by overt hostile or antisocial acts” (Behavior Problem, 2015).

Learning:

“The activity or process of gaining knowledge or skill by studying, practicing, being taught, or experiencing something” (Learning, 2015).

Social Communication:

“The synergistic emergence of social interaction, social cognition, pragmatics (verbal and nonverbal), and receptive and expressive language processing” (Social Communication Disorders in School-Age Children, 2015).

Who Will Benefit

The information obtained from the research will benefit both students and teachers. Educators were given the opportunity to see the benefit of literature as a teaching tool. The tools discussed in the surveys and interviews led to teacher insight on the variety of ways to use literature both academically and non-academically. Ideally, this would positively impact student behavior and the educator’s attitude surrounding classroom social environment. Students benefit from increased background knowledge on the connections between literature and their own lives.

Population

Participants included six kindergarten four second grade teachers, one third grade teacher, one fourth grade teacher, one sixth grade teacher, two special education teachers and one behavior specialist. All of the teachers work in low economic status elementary schools with a very diverse student population. The teachers have different classroom sizes, and different teaching styles. The needs of the students varied. All the teachers are currently employed and are in good standing within the district. The special education teachers all work with students in an elementary school setting. The behavior specialist works individually with children on behavior modification.

Data Collection

Data was collected with a survey questionnaire and interviews. The interview protocol included five open ended questions. The survey questionnaire included fourteen closed ended questions and four open-ended questions about the purposes of the genres used in the classroom and the influences of literature on students’ learning. There was room at the bottom for additional comments. Interview data was collected from teachers at a kindergarten teacher, a second grade teacher, a fourth grade teacher, and the behavior specialist. Each teacher teaches at in a Midwest urban elementary school. Survey data was collected from teachers at Midwest urban elementary school and a Montessori elementary school via a survey on Survey Planet.

**ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

Data was analyzed by the researchers through the viewing of teacher interviews. The researchers looked for developing premises in the responses of the teachers. The researchers read the surveys and made charts that visually represented the answers received for each question and the data was compared to determine results. Conclusions were drawn from the results.

Limitations

Limitations that occurred during the research included the short time period allotted to conduct the research: lack of response from the teachers, misunderstandings the teachers might have had with the questionnaire or interview protocol, and a small teacher population. Initially it was planned to distribute the survey within a suburbia school district in order to get an adequate amount of data. Due to district protocol and the proximity to spring break, the researchers were unable to have the districts’ teachers complete the survey. State testing limited the amount of time in the teachers’ day for recorded interviews. Instead, the questions were asked in person during quiet student activities. It took multiple days to complete the interview process.

Results

While analyzing responses to the close-ended questions from the survey, the researchers noticed a cluster of similar answers to a variety of questions. The results of the close-ended survey questions can be found below.

1. Which genres do your students like to read?

A majority of the surveyed teachers noted that their students enjoy reading picture books and nonfiction books the most. A majority of students also enjoy fantasy books, chapter books, and comic books. Graphic novels is the least favorite genre of the students in the surveyed teachers’ classrooms.

1. Do you encourage your students to explore different genres?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Yes | 16 |
| No | 0 |

Although students do have favorite genres, all of the teachers encourage their students to read books from different genres and explore their interests.

1. Does your school provide a reading specialist?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Yes | 6 |
| No | 9 |

A majority of the teachers answered that they do not have a reading specialist that is accessible at their school.

1. How important do you feel the role of literature is in students’ learning?

All of the surveyed teachers feel that reading is important or very important to the success of their students’ learning.

1. How often do you notice social communication negatively affecting your classroom?

This question provided a wide range of data. There was a three way split in the data of 25% each for 1-3 times a day, 1-3 times a week, and 1-3 times a month. With one teacher leaving this question blank, the remaining 18% answered that social communication never affects their classroom.

1. How often do you read aloud to your students?

All of the teachers read aloud to their students either daily or weekly. This is important because it means that teachers are using literature to entertain students and are working to enhance their students’ literacy.

1. What grade do you teach?

A majority of the teachers who were surveyed teach in the primary grades when building literacy skills is especially important. The fourth grade and sixth grade teachers helped give insight on the how to engage and motivate students in upper elementary and the special education teachers work with students who are struggling with their literacy skills.

1. What is the most fun subject for you to teach?

The most enjoyable subjects for teachers to teach are reading and math. According to the survey results, none of the teachers enjoy spelling and only one finds social studies to be an enjoyable subject to teach.

1. What kind of access to books do your students have? (1 representing no access and 10 representing unlimited access)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Access Level** | **Number of Responses** |
| 1 | 0 |
| 2 | 0 |
| 3 | 0 |
| 4 | 0 |
| 5 | 0 |
| 6 | 0 |
| 7 | 2 |
| 8 | 6 |
| 9 | 4 |
| 10 | 4 |

Although the surveyed teachers work with students in low economic status schools, all of the students have adequate access to books outside of the classroom.

1. How do you feel about technology and eBooks?

All of the teachers feel that eBooks are either useful or very useful to students in the classroom. This is important because as we move further into the twenty-first century, it will be important for teachers to use technology in the classroom.

1. What subject do you incorporate literature in the most?

It is easy to integrate literature into all subject areas, however the subject that the surveyed teachers incorporate literature in the most is reading. Other common subjects for literature integration are writing, science, and social studies. Only a fewer teacher incorporate it into math.

1. After reading to your students, do you ask review questions to check for understanding?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Yes | 16 |
| No | 0 |

All of the surveyed teachers noted that they ask review questions after their students read. Comprehension, sequencing, and summarizing questions are types of questions that teachers can use when checking for understanding.

1. Do your students seem engaged when you use literature in your classroom?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Yes | 16 |
| No | 0 |

Also, 100% of the teachers answered that their students seem engaged when they incorporate literature into their classroom. It is important for teacher to notice what their students do and do not enjoy in the classroom.

The close-ended survey questions agreed with our hypothesis because they proved that teachers are using literature in the classroom for a variety of purposes. Although teachers enjoy some subjects other than others, it was noted that literature can be used in most subject areas. Literature is a tool used by teachers of all grade levels.

While analyzing responses to the open-ended questions from interviews and questionnaires, the researchers noted three themes that emerged: understanding, bibliotherapy, and the development of literacy skills. The themes emerged from the following questions via Survey Planet and interviews:

What type of literature do you use when working with social and behavioral issues?

How do you use children’s literature to guide students’ learning?

What are some of the ways that you’ve found to be useful in motivating your students to read?

How do you use literature for instruction?

What challenges do you face within your classroom?

How do you involve your children with the stories you read?

How have you used literature to resolve a conflict in your classroom?

Do you use the library other than just for specials? If yes, how?

How do you encourage reading in your classroom?

The answers the researchers received to the open-ended questions answered our research questions and supported our hypothesis that teachers are using literature to meet students’ academic, social, and behaviorally needs. Literature is a cornerstone of the daily curriculum.

Qualitative Themes

Student Understanding: With a theme of student understanding, participants spoke about checking for student understanding before, during, and after lessons. Teachers check for understanding through class discussions, elbow partners, classroom activities and assessments. During class discussions, teachers can ask questions or bring up topics that were present in the literature. Questions most commonly incorporated are those that relate to comprehension, summarizing, and higher level thinking.

“Having them turn and discuss with a partner, having them draw their visualizations while I read, having them sequence a story while I read, using reciprocal teaching while I read, having them write a journal entry after the story, having them rate the story after we finish, etc.”

The above quote is important because it notes that there are a variety of ways that teachers can check for student understanding. The teacher noted both things that can be done during reading and things that can be done after reading.

“I ask them character names, I ask then what types of animals, colors, shapes and feelings the people had in the book.” Although the quote is from a primary level teacher, it shows that checking for student understanding is important, even at the earliest stages of reading. It tells the teacher whether or not students are comprehending what they are reading or what is being read to them.

When asked what type of review questions do you ask you students, one teacher answered: “higher level thinking questions, questions that make them think deep into the characters, questions over author's purpose.” These types of questions force students to think past summarizing the story. Students must, interpret the meaning behind the story and apply their own opinions to the stories.

Bibliotherapy: With a theme of bibliotherapy, participants spoke about using books when working with students on social skills and target behaviors. Bibliotherapy is the use of books to help people solve problems (Forgan, 2002). Before bibliotherapy can be successfully integrated into the classroom, teachers must notice that there is a need for it in their classroom. In order for the process to be as successful as possible, teachers should select books that relate to the issues they see in their classroom or events occurring in their students’ lives. The literature chosen should be used as an instructional tool.

Teachers read the chosen books to students or have students read the chosen books to themselves. It is important to allow students time to interpret the content and form a connection between the book’s content and their own lives. The most common types of books are used by teachers are picture books. Julia Cook is an author who writes her stories about issues that students can relate too. *Soda Pop Head* is her book that can be used with students who feel as if they might explode with anger. Another great book by Julia Cook is *It’s Hard to be a Verb*; this is about a little boy who is always active and moving. It would be a great book for teachers to use with their students who struggle with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

The behavior specialist from discusses how she would use literature with the children that she works with and she describes

“I would read a selected story with a child in session based on the presenting concern and then have a conversation about the character and how the character is similar to them. We would then discuss how the character solved the problem and how they can use the same strategy to solve their problem.”

The importance of her quote is that she describes the entire process of bibliotherapy; she works with her patients to form a connection and think of positive ways to solve a problem.

“Generally, children’s picture books show a good arc in character development and specifically how the character goes from acting a certain way or believing a certain thing and then comes to understand a better way of dealing with the situation. In the same way, you can use picture books to discuss social issues in a way that students are better able to understand certain concepts because they can understand the issue at an appropriate level for them.”

A second grade teacher also supports the use of bibliotherapy. She noted that most picture books show a good arc in character development. This is important because teachers do not need to seek out specific types of books or authors, they can use any book that relates to the issue at hand and the developmental level of the student. Helping students cope with the challenges they are facing should be a top priority for teachers if they want students to develop their literacy skills.

“I often use the "Help Me Be Good" series to help with some of the social situations that arise in kindergarten--really any grade! I let the students share text-to-self situations as needed.” This kindergarten teacher does not focus on how to use books, but instead on specific books that she uses in her classroom. Similar series include the Llama Llama books and books written by Julia Cook.

Development of Literacy:The development of literacy through reading, writing, and discussing the world of books and the written language is a theme that emerged from our results. “Becoming literate also includes mastering a complex set of understandings, attitudes, expectations and behaviors, as well as specific skills, related to written language” (McLane & McNamee, 1991). Reading books is a powerful way to start the foundation of literacy. As children are read to they acquire vast knowledge about reading and the realm of books. They start to understand the magical worlds created in books that are waiting to be read. Early experiences with literacy can be through playing while reading. A child may open their hands like a book and narrate a story they are imagining (McLane & McNamee, 1991). Play is where children make connections from their personal viewpoint to the importance of the larger community and the world. These broadening experiences can range from writing a thank you letter to the local firehouse, listening to a story read aloud by a teacher, and discussing with classmates what occurred in the story and how it made them feel. As children mature, pretend play changes from symbolic to more complex and abstract.

Literacy development doesn’t magically appear. It is part of a social process through children’s relationships with their parents, siblings, teachers, grandparents and caretakers. (McLane & McNamee, 1991). The interactions a child experiences make a huge impact on the development of literacy. This is done by providing materials, role modeling, offering help and encouragement, demonstrating the importance of readings and displaying a positive attitude.

“Students are in guided reading groups and learn at their own level. Between one reading rotations every day, we have a buddy reading time. Students buddy read sitting elbow to elbow and knee to knee and read. They look forward to this buddy reading time. They also can pull out their zippy book bags from their seat sack any time they get done with an assignment and read while others are still working. Other than that, on Friday's when they check out new books from our classroom library, they get to sit and read for Bell Work.”

Through this quote, we see a variety of ways to get students engaged and excited about reading. If students are not excited about reading, they will not develop the literacy skills necessary to be successful.

“If we are introducing a new concept, whether it be in Math, Science, Social Studies, or any subject area really, I often use non-fiction books to support learning, especially at the beginning of the unit. I also like to have a mini-library on the concepts accessible to students which they can access during their free time.”

Making books accessible to students sets up the foundation for the development of literacy skills. When students have access to books they have the opportunity and choice to open the books and explore.

“You have to look at the student’s interest especially at a school with low SES. If you can relate your literature that is selected to literature that students enjoy and can relate to it makes them more willing to want to try their best and enjoy the learning.”

In order to develop the literacy skills, students need to be motivated and want to learn. When reading is made out to be a passionate and engaging experience, students are more likely to put effort into it and want to get better.

**CONCLUSION**

It was the intent of the researchers to explore literature strategies and techniques used by teachers in elementary school settings. The researchers investigated how educators use literature as a resource for meeting students’ needs. The focus was on students’ social, behavioral, and academic needs. The researchers believed that this study would help educators develop ideas for using literature therapeutically in their own classrooms.

Through the study on how literature is used to influence learning and meet students’ needs, some insights emerged including themes of student understanding, bibliotherapy, and the development of literacy. Themes relate to the ways and reasons why teachers use literature in their classroom. Student understanding is important for teachers in determining whether or not students are grasping and remembering the curriculum content. Bibliotherapy is an aspect of literature that corresponds with the social and behavioral aspects of life. It is about teaching students to identify and connect with problems and then think about positive ways to solve the issues that they are facing. The development of literacy is concerned with the skills that students need in order to learn how to read and how to make literacy relevant in their own lives.

The researchers discovered that all of the teachers who were surveyed and interviewed use literature in their classroom for one of these three purposes. They are working to give students the literacy skills they need to be successful. Although a small percentage of the teachers use the library as a resource for themselves, it provides students with a source to find books on a genre or topic of interest. “A library was known to be the healing place for the soul” (Kurtts & Gavigan, 2008, p. 23). Books are a resource for students and teachers, alike. They create life-long readers and help students find connections between themselves and the characters in the books. Literature is a resource that teachers can use to help students and meet their needs socially, behaviorally, and academically.

**Appendix**

Interview Protocol

1. What type of literature do you use when working with social and behavioral issues?
2. How do you use children’s literature to guide students’ learning?
3. What are some of the ways that you’ve found to be useful in motivating your students to read?
4. How do you use literature for instruction?
5. What challenges do you face within your classroom?

Survey Questionnaire

Open Ended

1. How do your involve your children with the stories you read?
2. How have you used literature to resolve a conflict in your classroom?
3. Do you use the library other than just for specials? If yes how?
4. How do you encourage reading in your classroom?

Close Ended

1. Which genres do your students like to read? (Check all that apply)

Chapter Books

Cartoons/Comic Books/Magazines

Picture Books

Fantasy Books

Nonfiction Books

Sports Books

Graphic Novels

Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you encourage your students to explore different genres?

Yes No

1. Does your school provide a reading specialist?

Yes No

1. How important do you feel the role of literature is in students’ learning?

Very Important

Important

Sort of Important

Not Important

1. How often do you notice social communication negatively affecting your classroom?

Never

1-3 times a day

1-3 times a week

1-3 times a month

1. How often do you read aloud to your students?

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Less than Once a Month

1. What grade do you teach?

Kindergarten 4th Grade

1st Grade 5th Grade

2nd Grade 6th Grade

3rd Grade Special Education

1. What is the most fun subject for you to teach?

Spelling Social Studies

Reading Writing

Science Math

Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What kind of access to books do your students have? (1 representing no access and 10 representing unlimited access)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1. How do you feel about technology and eBooks?

Very Useful

Useful

Not Useful

No Opinion

1. What subject do you incorporate literature in the most?

 Spelling  Social Studies

 Reading  Writing

 Science  Math

 Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. After reading to your students, do you ask review questions to check for understanding?

Yes No

1. What kind of review questions do you ask your students?
2. Do your students seem engaged when you use literature in your classroom?

Yes No

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